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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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(CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Third periodic reports of States parties

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO*

* For the initial report submitted by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo see CEDAW/C/ZAR/1. For the second periodic report submitted by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo see CEDAW/C/ZAR/2.

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FOREWORD

1. The first and second reports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were produced under the Second Republic.

2. Since 17 May 1997, the date on which the new Government took over, some changes have taken place and should be noted.

3. This report therefore describes action taken by the new authorities since 17 May 1997 and thus complements the previous report, prepared in 1996.

ACTION TAKEN

A. Political

4. In this connection, mention should be made of the following:

(a) The political will to work for the advancement of Congolese women, demonstrated primarily by the maintenance of the national mechanism for women, the Family Division within the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Family. This political will has been demonstrated on many occasions by the following statements and actions of the Head of State:

- Speech of 30 June 1997 according women a special place;

- On 8 March 1998, International Women's Day, the Presidency of the Republic set up a fund to provide grants for Congolese women with a view to enhancing their economic power through income-generating activities;

(b) The establishment of the Government's Minimum Three-Year Plan, which takes into account the concerns of Congolese women in the priority areas designated by the Government. The Plan provides for:

- The improvement of the legal status of Congolese women;

- The enhancement of women's economic power;

- The improvement of the health and the promotion of the education of women and children;

(c) The establishment of a constituent assembly to examine the draft constitution prepared by the constitutional commission. Candidates for the future transitional parliament, who include a substantial number of women, are already submitting their files to the office in charge of recruitment without any discrimination;

(d) The restoration of peace and the security of property and of the individual. Under the system now established, all violence and violations of minority rights are punished very severely. The same applies to the ill-

treatment of children and women. It should be noted here that the establishment of the Rapid Reaction Police has contributed significantly to the improvement of the general situation in the country as regards the security of individuals and their property;

(e) The adoption of measures to ensure the independence of judiciary and to guarantee the exercise of individual and collective rights and freedoms. There has been a resulting improvement in the quality of the judiciary, which has imposed strict sentences for crimes committed by armed elements;

(f) The formation of a national organization to integrate young people into national life and the establishment of a national office to assist the marginalized sectors of society.

B. Legal

5. As indicated in previous reports, succeeding Constitutions in the country, including the latest draft constitution, which will be submitted to a popular referendum, grant all Congolese men and women the same fundamental rights and freedoms, without distinction as to sex, as those set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights are:

(a) The right to the free development of one's personality;

(b) The right to peace, development and the common heritage of humanity;

(c) The right to freedom of movement, enterprise, information, association, assembly, procession and demonstration, subject to respect for the law, public order and morals;

(d) The right to defend oneself before the law;

(e) The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of expression;

(f) The right to marry and to found a family with a person of the opposite sex of one's own choice;

(g) The right to education and instruction, to individual or collective ownership of property and to the inviolability of the home, correspondence, telecommunication and any other form of communication;

(h) The right to engage in trade, employment or strikes within the conditions established by the law;

(i) The right to a healthy environment and an improved state of physical, mental and social health.

6. It should be pointed out that the draft constitution of the Third Republic, in article 56, expressly specifies the following, for the first time: "The State has a duty to direct its endeavours towards the elimination of all discrimination against women and to ensure the protection of their rights".

7. In practice, the Government's efforts have been directed towards training women and making them aware of their rights and obligations, with a view to overcoming the ignorance of the vast majority of women.

8. Non-governmental organizations, at the instance of the Family Division, are engaging in major education campaigns aimed at the female population with regard to every aspect of life, including violence against young girls and girl children, the rights and duties of women in society, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

9. Legal advisory clinics, information stands and watchdog centres for the rights of women, young girls and girl children are being set up.

10. Women are lobbying to obtain decision-making positions for women.

11. Mention should also be made of the forthcoming establishment of a national women's council, a government advisory body to deal with women's issues, which will be made up of representatives of public institutions, non-governmental organizations and associations working for the advancement of women.

C. Economic and social

12. In this area, particular emphasis is placed on women's and children's health. The following significant action has been taken since 1997.

Health

13. Several campaigns have been mounted to raise awareness with regard to vaccination, breastfeeding, nutrition using local products, and safe pregnancy.

Education

14. The right to education is reaffirmed in the draft constitution and efforts are under way by the Government to take real responsibility for pupils and teachers, in order to give all categories of children, both girls and boys, the opportunity to pursue their studies.

The economy

15. The following achievements should be noted:

(a) The restoration of the transport infrastructures;

(b) The mechanization and modernization of agriculture;

(c) Efforts to provide electricity and drinking water for the whole population;

(d) The restoration of social, health and educational infrastructures;

(e) Industrialization and action to bring the mining sector into profit;

(f) Accurate information and action on unemployment;

(g) The revival of mining and agricultural production through the industrialization of the agricultural food sector.

D. National programme for the advancement of Congolese women

16. A national programme for the advancement of Congolese women (1998-2003) will be launched in the near future. The programme has been prepared with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, through the project "Enhancing women's capacities", which was set up following the National Forum on the Rights and Leadership of Congolese Women (2-6 September 1996). Over 200 participants in the Forum, both men and women, from every province in the country, drew up a national plan of action detailing the priority concerns of Congolese women, as recommended by the Fourth World Conference on Women.

17. The plan of action and the forthcoming five-year programme place particular emphasis on the promotion of women's rights in all areas, in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

18. The programme outlines the priority objectives and practicable action in the following areas:

(a) Women and education;

(b) The legal status of women;

(c) Women's leadership;

(d) Women's access to economic resources (action to combat poverty);

(e) Women and health;

(f) Women and culture;

(g) Women and the environment;

(h) Women, agriculture and food security;

(i) Girls and girl children;

(j) Data bank.